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ABSTRACT

Multiculturalism has been defined as the fourth force in psychology, one which complements the psychodynamic, behavioral, and humanistic explanations of human behavior. Pederson's (1991) definition of multiculturalism leads to the inclusion of a large number of variables making multiculturalism generic to all counseling relationships. Locke (1990) has advocated a narrower definition of multiculturalism, particularly as it relates to counseling. In this definition attention is directed toward the racial/ethnic minority groups within that culture. The effective counselor is one who can adapt the counseling models, theories, or techniques to the individual needs of each client. This skill requires that the counselor be able to see the client both as an individual and as a member of a particular cultural group. Multicultural counseling requires the recognition of the importance of racial/ethnic group membership on the socialization of the client; the importance and the uniqueness of the individual; the presence and place of values in the counseling process; and the uniqueness of learning styles, vocational goals, and life purposes of clients. The Multicultural Awareness Continuum is linear and the process is developmental. It is best understood as a lifelong process. It includes self-awareness; awareness of one's own culture; awareness of racism, sexism, and poverty; awareness of individual differences; awareness of other cultures; awareness of diversity; and skills/techniques. (ABL)

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Multicultural Counseling

Don C. Locke

Multiculturalism has been defined as the fourth force in psychology, one which complements the psychodynamic, behavioral and humanistic explanations of human behavior. Pedersen (1991) defined multiculturalism as "a wide range of multiple groups without grading, comparing, or ranking them as better or worse than one another and without denying the very distinct and complementary or even contradictory perspectives that each group brings with it" (p. 4). One of the most important debates within the field has to do with how this definition relates to specific groups within the context of a culture. Pedersen's definition leads to the inclusion of a large number of variables, e.g., age, sex, place of residence, education, socioeconomic factors, affiliations, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, making multiculturalism generic to all counseling relationships. Locke (1990), among others, advocates a narrower definition of multiculturalism, particularly as it relates to counseling. The narrower view is one where attention is directed toward "the racial/ethnic minority groups within that culture" (p. 24).

Regardless of how one defines the term or the degree to which the concept is restricted or broadened in a particular context, multiculturalism encompasses a world of complex detail. Hofstede (1984), identified four dimensions of cultures. These dimensions are:

1. Power distance—the extent to which a culture accepts that power in institutions and organizations is distributed unequally.
2. Uncertainty avoidance—the extent to which members of a culture feel threatened by uncertain or ambiguous situations.
3. Individualism—a social framework in which people are supposed to take care of themselves and of their immediate families only. Collectivism refers to a social framework in which people distinguish between in-groups and out-groups, expecting their in-group to look after them, and in exchange for that owe loyalty to it.
4. Masculinity/Femininity—the extent to which the dominant values within a culture are assertiveness, money and things, caring for others, quality of life, and people.

A number of generic counselor characteristics are necessary, but not sufficient, for those who engage in multicultural counseling. To be effective, a counselor must be able to:

1. Express respect for the client in a manner that is felt, understood, accepted, and appreciated by the client. Respect may be communicated either verbally or nonverbally with voice quality or eye contact.
2. Feel and express empathy for culturally different clients. This involves being able to place oneself in the place of the other, to understand the point of view of the other.
3. Personalize his/her observations. This means that the counselor recognizes that his/her observations, knowledge, or perceptions are "right" or "true" only for him/herself and that they do not generalize to the client.
4. Withhold judgment and remain objective until one has enough information and an understanding of the world of the client.
5. Tolerate ambiguity. This refers to the ability to react to new, different, and at times, unpredictable situations with little visible discomfort or irritation.
6. Have patience and perseverance when unable to get things done immediately.

Counselors bring with them their own degree of effectiveness with these generic characteristics. They also bring with them their cultural manifestations as well as their unique personal, social and psychological background. These factors interact with the cultural and personal factors brought by the client. The interaction of these two sets of factors must be explored along with other counseling-related considerations for each client who comes for counseling. The effective counselor is one who can adapt the counseling models, theories, or techniques to the unique individual needs of each client. This skill requires that the counselor be able to see the client as both an individual and as a member of a particular cultural group. Multicultural counseling requires the recognition of: (1) the importance of racial/ethnic group membership on the socialization of the client; (2) the importance of and the uniqueness of the individual; (3) the presence of and place of values in the counseling process; and (4) the uniqueness of learning styles, vocational goals, and life purposes of clients, within the context of principles of democratic social justice (Locke, 1986).

The Multicultural Awareness Continuum (Locke, 1986) was designed to illustrate the areas of awareness through which a counselor must go in the process of counseling a culturally different client. The continuum is linear and the process is developmental, best understood as a lifelong process.

Self-awareness. The first level through which counselors must pass is self-awareness. Self-understanding is a necessary condition before one begins the process of understanding others. Both intrapersonal and interpersonal dynamics must be considered as important components in the projection of beliefs, attitudes, opinions, and values. The examination of one's own thoughts and feelings allows the counselor a better understanding of the cultural "baggage" he or she brings to the situation.

Awareness of one's own culture. Counselors bring cultural baggage to the counseling situation; baggage that may cause certain things to be taken for granted or create expectations about behaviors and manners. For example, consider your own name and the meaning associated with it. Ask yourself the cultural significance of your name. Could your name have some historical significance to cultures other than the culture of your origin? There may be some relationship between your name and the order of your

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birth. There may have been a special ceremony conducted when you were named.

The naming process of a child is but one of the many examples of how cultural influences are evident and varied. Language is specific to one's cultural group whether formal, informal, verbal, or nonverbal. Language determines the cultural networks in which an individual participates and contributes specific values to the culture.

Awareness of racism, sexism, and poverty. Racism, sexism, and poverty are all aspects of a culture that must be understood from the perspective of how one views their effect both upon oneself and upon others. The words themselves are obviously powerful terms and frequently evoke some defensiveness. Even when racism and sexism are denied as a part of one's personal belief system, one must recognize that he/she never-the-less exists as a part of the larger culture. Poverty is a factor that, even when the anguish of poverty is not felt personally, the counselor must come to grips with his or her own beliefs regarding financially less fortunate people.

Exploration of the issues of racism, sexism, and poverty may be facilitated by a "systems" approach. Such an exploration may lead to examination of the differences between individual behaviors and organizational behaviors, or what might be called the difference between personal prejudice and institutional prejudice. The influence of organizational prejudice can be seen in the attitudes and beliefs of the system in which the counselor works. Similarly, the awareness that frequently church memberships exist along racial lines, or that some social organizations restrict their membership to one sex, should help counselors come to grips with the organizational prejudice which they may be supporting solely on the basis of participation in a particular organization.

Awareness of individual differences. One of the greatest pitfalls of the novice counselor is to overgeneralize things learned about a specific culture as therefore applicable to all members of the culture. A single thread of commonality is often presumed to exist as interwoven among the group simply because it is observed in one or a few member(s) of the culture. On the contrary, cultural group membership does not require one to sacrifice individualism or uniqueness. In response to the counselor who feels all clients should be treated as "individuals," I say clients must be treated as both individuals and members of their particular cultural group.

Total belief in individualism fails to take into account the "collective family-community" relationship which exists in many cultural groups. A real danger lies in the possibility that counselors may unwittingly discount cultural influences and subconsciously believe they understand the culturally different when, in fact, they view others from their own culture's point of view. In practice, what is put forth as a belief in individualism can become a disregard for any culturally specific behaviors that influence client behaviors. In sum, counselors must be aware of individual differences and come to believe in the uniqueness of the individual before moving to the level of awareness of other cultures.

Awareness of other cultures. The four previously discussed levels of the continuum provide the background and foundation necessary for counselors to explore the varied dynamics of other cultural groups. Most cross-cultural emphasis is currently placed upon African Americans, Native Americans, Mexican Americans or Hispanics, and Asian Americans. Language is of great significance and uniqueness to each of these cultural groups, rendering standard English less than complete in communication of ideas. It is necessary for counselors to be sensitive to words which are unique to a particular culture as well as body language and other nonverbal behaviors to which cultural significance is attached.

Awareness of diversity. The culture of the United Stated has often been referred to as a "melting pot." This characterization suggests that people came to the United States from many different countries and blended into one new culture. Thus, old world practices were altered, discarded, or maintained within the context of the new culture. For the most part, many cultural groups did not fully participate in the melting pot process. Thus, many African American, Native American, Mexican American, and Asian American cultural practices were not welcomed as the new culture formed.

Of more recent vintage is the term "salad bowl" which implies that the culture of the United States is capable of retaining aspects from all cultures (the various ingredients). Viewed in this manner, we are seen as capable of living, working, and growing together while maintaining a unique cultural identity. "Rainbow coalition" is another term used in a recent political campaign to represent the same idea. Such concepts reflect what many have come to refer to as a multicultural or pluralistic society, where certain features of each culture are encouraged and appreciated by other cultural groups.

Skills/Techniques. The final level on the continuum is to implement what has been learned about working with culturally different groups and add specific techniques to the repertoire of counseling skills. Before a counselor can effectively work with clients of diverse cultural heritage, he or she must have developed general competence as a counselor. Passage through the awareness continuum constitutes professional growth and will contribute to an increase in overall counseling effectiveness, but goes much further than that. Counselors must be aware of learning theory and how theory relates to the development of psychological-cultural factors. Counselors must understand the relationship between theory and counselors' strategies or practices. Most importantly, counselors must have developed a sense of worth in their own cultures before attaining competence in counseling the culturally different.

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